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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EG](#) [ER](#) [SO](#)  
SUBJECT: ISAIAS WOOS EGYPT ON SOMALIA

REF: DJIBOUTI 1199

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service Omar Suleiman met with President Isaias on October 3 to discuss Somalia and other regional issues, according to the deputy at the Egyptian embassy, Hossam Nureldein (protect). FM Gheit's stopover followed the June visit of FM Osman Saleh and PFDJ political chief Yemane Ghebreab to Cairo, where they delivered President Isaias' hand-written invitation to FM Aboul Gheit to meet with him, Nureldein stated. FM Gheit and Director Suleiman were in Asmara for approximately three hours before heading onward to Yemen.

¶2. (C) The October 3 meeting focused on Eritrea's initiative on Somalia. Isaias wants the Arab League, Egypt, Qatar, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia in particular, to propose a "regional initiative" that has been crafted by the GSE. The new strategy entails "less emphasis on Mogadishu" and more on bringing other actors to the table (Note: this is consistent with the GSE's position on Somalia and wanting to include Sheikh Aweys, Hizbul Islam, and other elements in the Somali discussion. End Note). The initiative would also call on Arab League nations to meet with African countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti in particular) to pitch the proposal and gain support. According to Mohamed El Mullah, cabinet advisor for African Affairs at the Egyptian MFA, the plan includes a cease-fire, widely inclusive discussions, and reconciliation. Isaias also stated that he would not recognize the "illegitimate" TFG as part of the strategy, according to El Mullah. He also said that Egypt had not accepted, but was still studying the proposal. Hossam believes that Isaias is pushing the Arab League to be the policy leader on this initiative in order to lend the proposal credibility.

¶3. (C) Hossam did not comment extensively on Egypt's support for the proposal. He stated, however, that it is unlikely the four nations proposed to lead the initiative will agree to Isaias' plans because Arab nations are dealing with their own African interests at the moment, such as the implications for Egypt of South Sudan separating from Khartoum. Hossam was also amused by Isaias' description of Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia: "a Christian nation invading a Muslim nation." Hossam believes Isaias chose these words specifically to try to incite the Egyptians' ire against Ethiopia.

14. (C) COMMENT: Given that the AU and IGAD have called for sanctions against Eritrea, Isaias is left with dwindling options on the African continent. As an alternative, Isaias is now seeking partnership from his Middle Eastern friends in an attempt to legitimize his alternative to the Djibouti process. If he can get the Arab League to side with him on Somalia, he will be vindicated for isolating Eritrea from the rest of the African continent and may be able to use his Middle Eastern allies/donors/trading partners to lobby against sanctions.

15. (SBU) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Cairo.  
McMULLEN